



Press Release

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NORFOLK NAVY FIRE FIGHTERS RESPOND TO NEW ORLEANS

By Ricky Brockman, CNI Fire and Emergency Services Department

NORFOLK, Va. -- When the Navy asked for volunteers to relieve the battered firefighters at Naval Air Station (NAS) New Orleans, just outside the city, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic, headquartered in Norfolk, Va., stepped up to the plate. Regional Fire Chief Bud Williams had no trouble finding volunteers willing to tolerate the austere living conditions and uncertain operating picture they would find on the ground in New Orleans.

Nine Navy Region Mid-Atlantic firefighters, including two paramedics and District Chief Stephen Cox, left Norfolk on Sept. 8th bound for New Orleans. Under the direction of Chief Cox, the contingent stood up a full service paramedic engine company at the Navy facilities on New Orleans' West Bank shortly after Katrina's landfall. They reported to a facility with no electricity, no hot food and no reliable water supply. Space was

another scarce commodity so firefighters had to improvise sleeping arrangements wherever they could find an opening, be it the hallway or maintenance bay.

Fire Captain Will Moody, Fire Captain/Paramedic Bradley Burgess, Firefighter/Paramedic Michael Palease, and Firefighters Thomas Brown, Will Stratton, Paul Allman, Robert McCabe and Jeffery Tomczak have responded to a variety of medical emergencies, spills, leaks and several small fires on the local Navy bases. With the Army's 82nd Airborne Divisions, the Louisiana National Guard, and elements of the Marine Corps Air-Ground Task Force housed on and operating from the Navy bases in the city, the fire fighters from the Tidewater area have their hands full keeping up with the potential fire hazards. The soldiers and Marines are sleeping in tents and are using generators for power so these forward deployed fire fighters are keeping close watch.

The firefighters are also performing a wide range of non-fire related work to help the bases and their residents. The Mid-Atlantic team, and NAS New Orleans fire fighters able to return to duty, have been clearing debris from rooftops, covering open roofs with tarps, putting up fencing and escorting contractors. "We are here to help" Chief Cox said, "We'll do whatever is needed, it's all in our position description while we're here." When rumors of discontent began to circulate, Firefighter/Paramedic Michael Palease (who is an IAFF Local F25 officer at Little Creek) was quick to defend his teammates and dispel any misconceptions. "We have mattresses, water, a bathroom and showers. Our living conditions are not bad at all, given the circumstances. We are grateful to be called on to help, this is the kind of work we can tell our grandchildren about."

Cutline information:

DSC00099: Many of the Federal firefighters, including those from the Tidewater area of Virginia, who deployed to New Orleans to assist in the recovery from Hurricane Katrina. U.S. Navy photograph.

DSC00002 and DSC00041: Federal firefighters who deployed to New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina rest on whatever is available – cots or chairs. U.S. Navy photograph.

Region fire logo: self-explanatory